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ABSTRACT

This booklet explains to a prospective volunteer or other person who deals with the elderly their special needs in regard to human relationships and how to satisfy them. The necessity of reinforcing or restoring the older person's sense of worth and dignity is emphasized. Special hints are given for visiting the elderly in a group facility as opposed to at home. (CL)

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IT'S GOOD TO BE HAVE A FRIEND!

To the Memory of
Mabel Q. Power

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Miss Mae T. Mooney has been the principal instructor in the training course upon which this material is based. Miss Mooney, a retired casework supervisor with the Family Service Association of Boston, has provided dynamic leadership. Her own sense of humor and zest for life, coupled with her broad professional experience, have helped all in the understanding of older persons and the process of aging. She forces others to examine their own attitude toward the aged, and, thus, the process of aging in themselves.

The training course has been funded by the Massachusetts Department of Education, through the Division of Vocational Education. The Age Center's volunteer program, "New Roles for Older Americans" was funded from 1967 to 1970 by a grant from the Aging Bureau, Massachusetts Department of Community Affairs, under Title III Older Americans Act.

Support for the publication of the material has come from the Mabel Q. Power Memorial Fund of the Age Center of Worcester Area, Inc. Mrs. Power was a remarkable older person, gifted as a teacher, an administrator, and a friend. She shared her gifts with community agencies, which she served in many administrative roles, and with a wide circle of friends. By her example, she taught others about aging with dignity.

Mrs. Ruth Baker, Director of Volunteers of the Age Center of Worcester Area, Inc., prepared the content of this booklet.

INTRODUCTION

You are interested in older persons, and this booklet is written for you. You may be young, middle-aged, or elderly; black or white; male or female; rich or poor; educated or uneducated; Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, or something else; native-born or immigrant; and employed or volunteer. Any number of other characteristics may describe you, but the characteristic which moves you to read this is your interest in, and concern for, the elderly.

The following material is an outgrowth of the training course which has been offered to prospective volunteers by the Age Center of Worcester Area, Inc. since 1964. The material, given semi-annually, has been modified and updated with each presentation to keep pace with current developments and to meet, as nearly as possible, the needs of the trainees. Initially, the course was offered to men and women who agreed to become a friendly visitor to an elderly person, accepting the responsibility of an in-depth, one-to-one, lasting relationship. Later, the privilege of taking the course was extended to persons who were employed as staff in nursing homes; volunteers who elected to visit in nursing homes, usually relating to groups of patients; volunteers of retirement age who planned to accept other kinds of placements; and various professional and paraprofessional persons working with the elderly. The essentials of good relationships have a universal quality, and trainees have commented that the course has been helpful in their associations with persons of all ages — in parent-child relationships, husband-wife relationships, friend-to-friend, and colleague-to-colleague.

The friendly visitor is not a new invention. From time immemorial, people have shown others that they cared. As neighbors, relatives, friends and fellow-parishioners, men and women often have shared their time, energy, talents, and interests with the ill, the isolated, and the lonely.

Why do we make such a fuss over it now? Recent medical and sociological developments have brought about

changes. For one thing, there are more aged persons than ever before. Thanks to a marked increase in the average life expectancy, there are about 20,000,000 persons over 65 years of age in the United States. Because this is a highly mobile society, many elderly persons are separated by many miles from their children and grandchildren. There has been a marked shift from rural to urban living. In rural life there was always space as well as need for older persons in the household. There were many chores which they could do. In urban life, families are more likely to live in apartments or smaller homes. Many elderly persons live at or below the poverty level. And, because this is a youth-oriented and work-centered culture, the elderly are often excluded from the mainstream of community life and made to feel that they have lost their value.

While many striking physical structures designed for the elderly have been built, either as housing developments or health care facilities, there has been a growing realization that "bricks and mortar" are not enough. Important as a sound home and creature comforts may be, people need human contact.

Social agencies, religious groups, councils on aging, and other types of organizations have sponsored friendly visitor programs in order to fill some of the gaps in the lives of the elderly. An organized program will provide structure, training, supervision, and feedback, in contrast to the casual unsupervised service. Invariably the friendly visitor is seen as one important link in the chain of health and social services which the community provides.

The sponsoring agency accepts requests for friendly visitors from other health, social, and welfare agencies, from family members, or from older persons themselves who know of the service and wish to enjoy its benefits. The sponsoring agency obtains important information about the older person and tries to match him up with a congenial friendly visitor. Transportation, age, background, and interests are some of the factors to be considered.

Before a visitor is assigned, there is discussion with the older person. Also, the visitor is given some information about the "friend" and is told where to turn for supervision and guidance.

After placement, friendly visitors find it helpful to meet as a group for discussion of their experiences. They do not talk about individuals, but rather discuss the dynamics of their experiences and learn from one another about how they are coping with their relationships. Group discussions or seminars are informative and supportive.

The manual deals with older persons and friendly visitors of both sexes. There is a tendency to use the female pronoun, probably because women far outnumber men, both in the ranks of older persons and friendly visitors. The needs of men and the contributions of male friendly visitors are recognized and valued.

WHAT DOES ONE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT OLDER PEOPLE?

"The major characteristic of older people is that of being extraordinarily individualistic.

"Each person is in himself the 'sum of all his days,' of what he has done with them, and what they have done to him.

"He is totally different from every one of his fellows — even from members of his own family who may have been exposed to the very same influences and events. . . ."

Miss Ollie A. Randall
National Council on the Aging, 1964

They are a very mixed group. Don't try to "homogenize" them! There are as many differences among them as there are among any age group. Actually, to refer to all persons over 60 or 65 as the "aged" is misleading and unfortunate. That groups together persons whose ages fall within a 30 to 40 year span. No other segment of the life span is treated that way! Some writers prefer to consider those between the ages of 60 and 80 as the "aging" and those who are over 80 as the "aged." No one ever seems to want to define "middle-aged." One outstanding gerontologist suggests that 80 might be the upper-limit of middle-age — as she herself approaches her 80th birthday. We are all "aging" every day of our lives. Circumstances make some people "age" more quickly than others.

All too often we describe the characteristics of people who happen to be elderly at the present time and then assume we have also described the aging process. This is not justifiable. The psychological and social characteristics of elderly people change to some extent with every generation. Many of these changes are important enough to suggest that there is no fixed portrait of the senior generation; each generation must sit for its own.

The aged, today, tend to have been born in Europe; to come from large families; to have had little formal educa-

tion; to have organized their lives around work, religion, and family; to have struggled hard for a living; to have enjoyed few avocations; and to have made few plans for old age.

The newer "old persons" will tend to be native-born; better educated; more secure financially in later years; to have planned for retirement; and to find society more flexible and understanding. These differences favor an increasingly positive view of the older person and "old age" as times goes by.

Regardless of chronological age, older people have the same feelings as human beings of any age and the same needs. *Basic needs are the need to be loved, the need for approval, the need to have some responsibility, and the need to accomplish. (That is, a sense of worth.)*

Here are some facts which apply to the aging, in a greater or lesser degree.

Aging is characterized by losses. There are many losses — friends, family, job, status, money, neighborhood, health, scheduled use of time, physical attractiveness, and dignity. Some elderly persons react to loss of friends by rejecting new ones. They are afraid to risk another relationship. They seem to say: "I'll reject you before you reject me." They will not invest affection because they do not want to go through being hurt again. (Younger people do this, too.) Some older persons escape into unreality because reality is so grim. They live in the past because they feel they have no future. "When the future appears without promise, the now is lacking in satisfaction, so memories of the pleasures or achievements of the past (often exaggerated) become the sedative that deadens the present."*

As one gets older, there are fewer areas in which he can function. Work and home responsibilities are altered, and there usually are changes in role or status. Actual mobility may be diminished.

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*Miss Mae Mooney

As one gets older, there are fewer sources of affection and fewer things that give one a sense of value and security. The older person may be removed from family members and friends who have been both givers and receivers of affection. "I have no one to give a hug to — or a kiss on the cheek!", said a 74-year-old woman recently. Emptiness results. Loneliness, fears as to what is ahead, pain, loss of defenses, (those devices we use in health to ward off unhappy thoughts) all result in feelings of depression. Depression is manifested in older people by withdrawal. Some older persons make themselves unattractive and unlikeable because they have such a poor estimate of themselves. At any age, one has to like one's self quite a little to be happy. When one feels sour, he acts sour. Then he is neither lovable nor likeable.

Along with the losses of aging there are gains. As one grows older he gains freedom of choice, freedom from excessive demands on his vitality, freedom to pursue interests without competitive claims on his time, and freedom from the tribulations and burdens of child rearing. It is important for the older person to try to compensate unhappiness over loss by happiness over gains.

Many older persons continue to exhibit characteristics which have endeared them to others during their earlier years. A sense of humor, pride in their appearance, concern for others, an interest in the opposite sex, wisdom, faith, judgment, joy in greeting a new day, appreciation of beauty, and a philosophy of life. Many of them have coped with whatever life has dealt them with remarkable strength and courage, and in many instances they offered a wonderful example to others. The older person must have appropriate stimulation and suitable outlets for these attributes in order to keep them functioning well.

WHAT DOES BEING A FRIENDLY VISITOR REQUIRE OF YOU?

Be responsible

When you accept this assignment, you make a commitment to be a friend on a long-term basis. Don't start unless you are willing to continue. The last thing you want to do is to subject the older person to another loss. Sometimes a break is inevitable. Unexpected events may occur in your life. But as you foresee the future, be sure that you are prepared to be constant.

Within your long-range commitment, avoid broken promises. If something interferes with a scheduled visit, notify your friend. On your first contact, find out how you can communicate if she has no phone. If you know in advance, you may write to change plans, but remember that mail is often slow. (Be sure that your friend can read. Be sure that she can get to her mailbox every day. A woman who is handicapped by arthritis, for example, may be dependent upon someone else to bring in the mail and this may be done only once a week or every few days.)

Be a Member of the "helping" team

A friend is a person whom one knows, likes, and trusts. You are a friend who will be warm, faithful, devoted, and trustworthy. You are not a doctor, a lawyer, a clergyman, or a social worker. Know the limitations of your role and function within them.

The social worker or the Director of Volunteers who assigns you to be a friendly visitor to an older person will give you some background information about your friend and help you understand what the goal of your relationship might be. It is important to be aware of your friend's potential in terms of rehabilitation and physical activity. For example, recently a friendly visitor was discouraged because her friend refused an invitation to go out for a ride on a beautiful day. She felt that she was a failure in this relationship, contributing nothing. The social worker,

on the other hand, pointed out that the visitor had made an impressive contribution. The friend had been institutionalized in a mental hospital for more than 35 years. She was able, as a result of the friendly visitor's patient attention, to receive her graciously and carry on a limited conversation. She developed enough interest outside herself and enough self-confidence to walk to the library and take out books. The social worker pointed out that the visitor was indeed achieving very realistic goals, and that this woman would probably never be sufficiently secure to go for a ride and permit herself such social diversions, or if she did, it would be much later on.

Your supervisor or the person who directs your assignment as a volunteer will be interested to know of physical or emotional changes which you may observe. By reporting such changes in your conferences, whether the changes are positive or negative, you are acting as a responsible member of the "team" in the agency under which you work.

Discover sources of comfort and pleasure

As you learn to know your friend you will discover what kinds of shared experiences bring her comfort and pleasure. The religious person may enjoy having you read psalms or other passages from the Bible. For many, music is the universal language, and listening to records or radio together may be very pleasurable. Consider your friend's taste in music if you are to have a listening hour. Some persons enjoy poetry — reading it, reciting poetry which was memorized long ago, or even composing new poetry. You may enjoy helping your friend put on paper some of the poetry which she "has in her head." A woman in her 80s, both blind and deaf, has recently requested a friendly visitor who could take shorthand and type, so she could record some of the poetry which the woman feels. For many men and women, Nature is the greatest source of comfort and joy. The friend who cannot go out may respond to pictures or to an occasional flower or a small plant. If you are able to take your friend out for a walk or ride, a drive to enjoy

the exciting beauties of Spring or the glorious colors of Autumn may be particularly delightful. A bird watcher will welcome the opportunity to see birds on the wing, or, at least, in books and magazines. Many nursing homes have capitalized on these interests by placing bird feeders at windows where the residents may watch them.

Be sensitive

You will hear frequent complaints from older people about not having enough money, about their health, or about the meanness of people toward them. It is socially acceptable to complain about these things but often these are a cover-up for feelings of hurt, fear, or anger.

The friendly visitor listens with "the third ear" for what is going on below the surface of the complaint. The aged mother may complain about her daughter-in-law's extravagance, her son's disloyalty, or her grandchildren's indifference. Some of her complaints may be well-founded; others may be the result of her own excessive demands upon her family out of her need to feel loved and important. In some instances, she will exaggerate their wrongdoings. Or she may have driven them away by her own carping and unpleasant manner.

Too often relatives and friends do not visit because they feel guilt about the condition under which the older person lives — alone, or in an unpleasant type of institution. Friends coming to see their older friend may over-identify with the living conditions because they are reacting according to their present health and activity situation. In reality, the older person in a nursing home may be infinitely more secure than if living in his own home.

When you have a good relationship, you might help her to look more objectively at others. "Look," you might say, "what did you talk about the last time your son was here? Were you pleasant or did you pound his ear with complaints?" Or, "Your daughter-in-law has a passion for shoes — so what if she has 75 pairs of shoes in her closet?

True, she can wear only one pair at a time, but she enjoys them and that's a matter between her and your son."

If her family has been inattentive, you may be helpful in trying to reconnect her with them. Encourage her to write when that seems appropriate, but avoid making contact with them without her knowledge and consent. Don't let yourself be drawn into a situation which you cannot handle or should not be expected to handle. Avoid being trapped in a "triangle" situation with your elderly friend and a third party such as the social worker, nurse, or a family member. It is not uncommon for a friend to try to play one person against another. Try to avoid this kind of complication.

Encourage independence

As a visitor you want to be helpful. You may do simple errands and assist in other ways, but avoid being used and fostering dependence on the part of the older person. The general rule is to encourage the older person to do as much as possible for herself.

Once in a while a friendly visitor is exploited by the older person. One woman who had been quite ill asked her friendly visitor to come on a Saturday afternoon. The visitor discovered when she arrived that the kitchen was stacked with a mountain of dirty dishes. Being a generous, helping person and aware of her friend's recent illness, the visitor proceeded to wash all the dishes and felt pleased to be able to provide help. On two subsequent visits the same scene greeted the visitor and she began to feel that she was being exploited and that her friend was becoming unnecessarily dependent.

She handled it by explaining gently, but firmly, that she had come to visit, and if she spent her entire time washing dishes, she was deprived of the opportunity to visit. Apparently this explanation was accepted.

Give credit for partial achievement

The aged need praise and respond if it is honest praise. Let's say that you and your friend set a goal. Perhaps it has to do with a skill — crocheting, knitting, or needlepoint, or playing Scrabble; or it may have to do with an effort to improve her appearance or straightening up her room or writing a letter. Learn to give credit for partial achievement. When the person "begins to commence to start," this is a good sign. Give encouragement and approval.

Respect confidentiality

The story of your friend's life and doings are not to be used as a topic of conversation at home or in the neighborhood. Careless use of such information is *gossip!* "When we can forego the pleasure of telling a 'juicy bit' about someone for the sake of the greater good for that person — that's the day we take a step toward maturity."

Accept ups and downs in mood and behavior

Be prepared for ups and downs, highs and lows. Don't assume that the condition and mood you encounter on one visit will prevail upon your next visit. They may; they may not.

If the older person has health problems, the physical condition may change from time to time. On a good day your friend may be very pleasant and congenial, while on a bad day pain, discomfort, or general malaise may interfere with the visit. Emotional swings may be apparent also. The older person, like the rest of us, reacts to weather, news, events around him, disappointments, and anxiety. Be prepared for changes and try to understand them.

Your friend should have the privilege of calling you to cancel or postpone a visit when she feels that a visit would be too taxing.

Build on what the older person can do

Select activities that are suitable to your friend's condition. If there is a visual problem, select books and magazines with large type — there are many available.

If there is a hearing problem, learn to speak slowly and distinctly. Speak face-to-face, rather than from the side or from behind the person. Sometimes you may feel that the older person is unresponsive. Perhaps you have not been heard. You may have to signal. Try a gentle touch on the shoulder or arm to indicate that you are speaking. You may want to encourage the older person to learn lip-reading or to ask the physician about the advisability of a hearing aid.

Be thoughtful about gifts

The friendly visitor often wants to take gifts to the older person. Remember that the greatest gift you have to offer is yourself. By visiting, spending time with the friend, and showing interest, you give an invaluable gift. When you take material things you may make your friend uncomfortable because it is difficult to reciprocate. Be selective, take a small gift as an occasional treat, but avoid the habit of a gift at every visit.

What are some suitable gifts? Flowers, cuttings of plants, magazines, books. You may want to give your friend a clipboard or a small bulletin board to encourage her to cut out items which will be of interest on your next visit. She may enjoy a particular picture or cartoon, a piece of poetry, or a quotation.

A gift of cookies or candy may be very welcome if the diet permits such treats. Be sure that there is a suitable place for keeping cookies and candy. An attractive tin or jar may be a good idea. Personal gifts are appropriate for special occasions, but know the person's likes and dislikes before you make a selection. For example, some persons adore lovely handkerchiefs while others consider handkerchiefs a waste of money. Choice of colors is important.

Preferences in fragrances vary so much that you ought to have some clue before selecting toilet articles.

What do you do when your friend wants to give you a gift? Consider the circumstances. If you decline, you take away dignity and the right to self-determination. If you accept, it may help your relationship. Within reasonable limits, accept small gifts. But if your friend wishes to give you something of value, do not accept it without first clearing with a member of her family or someone who has legal responsibility. Sometimes the older person gets carried away with affection and gratitude and wants to give away family heirlooms. This might lead to trouble and embarrassment later.

Know community resources

It is important to know community resources. Your friend may be eligible for certain benefits or services which she may not know about. Your training experience and your contact with a social work agency or Director of Volunteers will help you know what the resources are and the channels for utilizing them.

Your friend may be eligible for financial assistance and you may be able to help her make the necessary contact. If your community has a food program, either food stamps or the direct distribution of commodity foods, she should take advantage of them if she is eligible. Talking books are available for persons who are visually handicapped. There is no charge to the user with a physician's certification of the visual problem. An extensive library of talking books is available, and you might help your friend to enjoy hours of companionship when she is alone. An increasing number of medical resources and medical benefits are available to older persons. You may be able to help your friend receive the full benefit of the program to which she is entitled.

Other responsibilities of a friendly visitor are to read and to keep informed regarding legislation and other matters concerning social action as it affects the elderly. You may want to write to legislators, or encourage the older

person to write on behalf of matters which concern the elderly.

Be supportive in grief

As a friendly visitor you will come up against the subject of death and dying in a variety of ways. Death is a taboo word in our society, and many persons are uncomfortable discussing death. Some avoid using the word even when it does occur. Nurses sometimes use the terms "the patient has expired" or "has apparently ceased to breathe." You may find that your elderly friend is reacting to the death of someone important to her, or that she is preoccupied with thoughts of her own dying, even perhaps seeming to wish for it.

How can you help? Your own attitude toward death is very important in your relationship with your elderly friend. You must strive for a feeling of ease and relaxation in the discussion and try to develop a positive attitude. Think about how you handle loss and try to find out how your friend has coped with losses in the past.

People sometimes need to cry, and tears are helpful. Crying is normal, and crying with a trusted friend may be sustaining. (In our culture, men are taught that it is a sign of weakness to cry, but if you can enable a grieving man to shed tears, you may be helping more than you know.) Grief which is bottled up is like the infection in a wound. It will make trouble. Reassurance too soon does no good. Avoid being too soupy, and above all, avoid a long recitation of your own experiences with grief when your friend is adjusting to a recent loss.

In a positive, enabling relationship, you will help your friend work through the various stages of emotional response to loss. One writer, Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, described the five stages as (1) denial, (2) anger, (3) bargaining, (4) depression, and (5) acceptance. Some persons never get off the level of depression and tend to direct all their feelings inward. In some instances, just your presence

may be the most important thing during grief. Just being there may be more helpful than any words.

If the older person is facing death and is preoccupied with it, try to reinforce her own sense of worth and dignity. Try to put into words, simply and sincerely, your feeling about the contribution she has made, and how she will be remembered. Better still, try to enable the older person to put into words her own feelings about what her life has meant.

If the older person is feeling that she will leave nothing of value, you may be able, by your sensitive listening and questioning, to help her put into words her feelings about children or grandchildren, or persons whose lives she has touched during her work career, or things which she created.

One thing we can all be sure of is an eternity on earth. Try to find ways to indicate your appreciation of the older person's lasting worth, and to enable her to realize this herself. Compassion and true respect for the dignity of your friend will help you in dealing with this sensitive area.

Don't shut off conversation about death and dying. For example, think about your response if an elderly patient, very uncomfortable because of a hip fracture, should say to you, "The doctor tells me I am getting better. I don't understand it. I just don't understand why God doesn't take me. I pray every night to be taken." If you say something like this, "That is foolish talk: you're getting better and that's wonderful," you are *not* tuned in on her wave length. Can you say something like this: "I suppose that right now death seems to make more sense to you. You're so uncomfortable. You say you pray every night. Can you tell me something about what prayer means to you?"

If you have learned to know your friend well in your relationship you will know something about her religion, her concept of God, her concern over final judgment and salvation, and what might provide a source of comfort for her. You might inquire about whether or not she has been in contact with a clergyman, and whether she wishes you to make a contact for her.

HOW TO WEAVE A RELATIONSHIP

Under the right conditions, almost every individual will act responsibly. The "right conditions" imply relationships which make the individual feel comfortable, accepted, safe, warm, and secure. Growth and change take place through a relationship with a helping person. When the older person likes and trusts you, you can help her "reconnect with other activities and persons."

It is not so much what you do but "how you are" that influences your relationships. Remember that all of us are conditioned by our contacts and associations in the past. Family relationships influence our behavior toward others.

There are great differences in our ability to make adjustments to life situations and to accept losses. There are tremendous differences in ego-strength among individuals. Some individuals are damaged persons because their early life experiences have not enabled them to develop ego-strength. One of the functions of the helping professions is to provide a corrective experience through a steady warm relationship. The friendly visitor can often do this.

Knowing this, it is important that the friendly visitor become really acquainted with the older person. This requires listening to what is told you and then trying to fill in the gap with a careful question. One writer refers to this as "creative listening." Then, with knowledge of how the older person met problems or losses in earlier life, what hobbies or special talents characterized the more active years, the kind of social groups, schooling, friends, and immediate family to which the older person belonged, the friendly visitor has material on which to build her relationship and do what she can to help.

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ESSENTIALS FOR A GOOD RELATIONSHIP

Ingenuity

Be creative in planning your visits. Find ways to vary the activity and the tempo, but remember that a certain amount of routine spells security.

Self-Awareness

Learn to know your own foibles and weaknesses. Can you accept another person's being dependent if you happen to be a strong, determined person who has always coped with life? Can you accept dirt and clutter? Can you be comfortable with illness, pain, poverty, loneliness, sadness, anger? These are all conditions which you may encounter. You must know yourself well enough to be able to handle your own weaknesses and prejudices and see your elderly friend as a human being with feelings, desires and a potential for growth.

Warmth

Learn to express warmth in word and action. Many persons are not demonstrative, and find it difficult to express warmth. Some cannot even accept a compliment graciously. You may not like your friend at first, but it is important to develop a liking as you know one another better and show your liking. Be genuine. Your friend will recognize phoniness.

Many elderly persons miss the warmth of physical contact. Learn the value of a hand clasp, a gentle touch on the shoulder, or the holding of hands. An affectionate hug, given or received, can brighten the day. If you can present your cheek for a kiss, you may bring joy to your lonely friend.

Ability to listen

One of the most valuable gifts you bring is your readiness to listen.

Time is almost the most precious gift, but with older persons whose attention span is short, half to one hour is usually enough. Encourage your friend to talk. Be prepared to answer questions about yourself. This may set the stage for her to talk to you. Answer in short sentences — not in paragraphs. Your friend may be very curious about you — your family — your home — your reasons for coming to visit her. If you answer honestly and briefly, you start to build trust and convince her of your good intent.

Be prepared for silences, too, and learn to be comfortable with silence. Don't rush to fill in the pauses. You may interrupt or stifle thoughts which may be slow in finding expression. A supervisor observed a very well-motivated woman fire questions at an elderly gentleman in such a rapid, staccato fashion that before he could respond to the first, she had fired three more. Later, the visitor reported that her friend had not been at all communicative that day. She never gave him a chance!

Silence, shared with a valued friend, may be a reassuring and refreshing experience.

Sensitivity

Learn to listen with "the third ear" and pick up cues. You will have to tune in on how your friend is feeling, what interests her, what frightens her, and what she would enjoy sharing with you as a visitor. As one sensitive visitor has said, "I laugh with her, yes, and sometimes cry with her, and I like to think we are both the better for it."

Behavior is symptomatic of happy or unhappy feelings. Unhappy people break and smash things, complain about everything, or they may sulk. Some aged persons are surly or hostile; some are too sweet and compliant. With the understanding that behavior is symptomatic, the friendly visitor is sensitive and responsive to moods. After you have established a real relationship, a question such as "What's eating you?" or "What happened to upset you?" may help the person to talk about what has been upsetting.

Visit-to-visit continuity

Sometimes it's hard to maintain continuity from visit to visit. There are several things that you can do. Send a card or a note between visits. This is particularly important if you are going to be away. Of course, you will let your friend know in advance when you plan to be away and will have to skip a visit. A telephone call, just for a little extra chat, may be a very pleasant contact. But most important, indicate that you have thought about her during the interval since your previous visit. You might say something like this, "Remember our discussion about the things you used to do when your children were young? You made some very good points about mothers and children learning things together." Or, "When I was making my bed the other day, I recalled some of the things you had told me about the defense work you used to do during World War II. I was impressed with how you adapted yourself to the demands of those years and managed everything so well."

The friendly visitor can enable the older person to plan for tomorrow or next week, and so bring some future. By helping the elderly person to keep functioning and to have a sense of enjoyment, you help avoid or postpone deterioration and regression. It has been pointed out that "When dreams fade, men slow down and rapidly age."

Appreciation of differences

One of the finest compliments you can pay another person is to show an interest in and learn about her ethnic background and religion. As you do this you will enrich your own life and enable her to give something to you of her own cultural background.

Among the most beautiful and mutually helpful relationships between friendly visitor and friend are those between persons of vastly different backgrounds. Examples are a woman who came from Nova Scotia, visiting an elderly friend of Armenian background; a Protestant woman visiting a person of orthodox Jewish background; a con-

servative Jewish man visiting a black man who came originally from Jamaica; a modest middle-class woman visiting a person who perceived herself as upper-class, and who was terribly scornful and resistant at first. Each has contributed to the other a knowledge of customs, traditions, and beliefs. As a result, each has felt enriched by the relationship.

Dignity

Address the older person properly as Mr., Mrs., or Miss So and So. Do not use first names unless and until you are invited to do so. Above all, avoid such terms as "honey" or "dearie."

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WHEN YOU ARE A VISITOR IN A NURSING HOME

One can be very much alone even though he is surrounded by other persons, and patients in group facilities often need the attention and interest of the friendly visitor. Many volunteers have selected placement in a nursing home in preference to visiting an older person in his or her own home or apartment. This again highlights one of the advantages of being a volunteer. You may make a choice!

This section will deal with visiting the elderly in a group facility. While there are differences among rest homes, nursing homes, homes for the aged, and long-term institutions, this section will use the term "nursing home" to indicate a group facility rather than mention all the various kinds of institutions.

What are some of the things which you as a friendly visitor need to be aware of when your "friend" is in a group facility?

1 . . . She is there because she required some kind of special medical, nursing, threapeutic, or custodial care. She could not live in her own home, and for a variety of other reasons she could not live with a member of the family.

2 . . . She may or may not be pleased about this placement.

3 . . . She has had to relinquish a certain amount of privacy and a certain amount of liberty when she came to reside in a group facility. For example, the person who prefers to sleep late, eat brunch instead of breakfast and lunch, and then stay up very late to watch the late, late show, will have to give up those preferences in order to comply with the schedule of the nursing home and the needs of other residents.

4 . . . While she has given up certain liberties, she receives the care which meets her physical needs. In an enlightened institution devoted to total patient care, social, emotional and spiritual needs are considered as well as physical needs. The older person may be far more comfortable, secure, and happy than in any other setting.

You will find volunteering in a nursing home very rewarding. If there is an Activities Director she will probably be responsible for scheduling the volunteers and helping to plan their assignments. Some institutions have a Director of Volunteers to handle this responsibility. You may be assigned to several patients as a friendly visitor. Your relationship may not involve quite the same depth as the one-to-one relationship, but the same principles must apply. You may be asked to assist with some of the programmed activities such as crafts, parties, discussion groups, entertainment, religious services, picnics, shopping expeditions, and trips. Your own interest and aptitudes will help to determine the kind of placement you will receive.

You may encounter expressions of hostility, anger, and depression. These may be manifestations of the patient's physical ill health or unhappiness at having been placed in a nursing home. Some patients perceive this as total rejection by family, friends, and physician. In some instances these feelings are symptomatic of fear, and some are valid, reality-based responses to a situation which is far from comfortable. You are likely to hear complaints about the food, the personnel, the other patients, and the lack of attention from family and friends.

Try to be warm and sensitive. Listen carefully and try to understand what the patient is really saying. Avoid being caught in a triangle with nursing home personnel, caseworkers, or other patients. Learn the nursing home's procedures for volunteers and follow them. Remember that you are not working alone. Share your experiences — both positive and negative — with the staff — Activities Director, the Director of Volunteers, or the charge nurse — whoever may have the responsibility for your service as a volunteer in that facility, but be certain that the older person is aware of your communication with the staff.

Remember that the person in the nursing home has the opportunity to make friends and establish new relationships among the patients. These may prove to be very

wholesome and satisfying. Also, the opportunity for group participation may be an advantage whether one is a member of a group working on a project, a discussion group, a group playing games, or a sing-along. Membership in a group may offer stimulation and support and may recapture some of the morale-building qualities of earlier group associations such as school, union, church, work setting, or family.

SUMMARY

Loneliness is not a matter of poverty. Rich people may be lonely, too. It is a matter of human contact and relationships and the fulfillment of basic needs.

The friendly visitor reinforces — or restores — the older person's sense of worth and dignity.

The friendly visitor receives gratifying rewards through a relationship with an older person. It is a two-way deal, in which both parties are enriched, as they learn to know one another and share mutually-satisfying experiences.

The older person may make it easier for a younger person to face aging and may help volunteers and professionals to feel that they play a very significant part in the continued development of our civilization.

OLD AGE

The fall of me
and the all of me

Still calls to the Spring
and the tall of me.

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DO'S FOR THE FRIENDLY VISITOR

1. Listen — Be interested and responsive, even to a story told repeatedly — but learn to interrupt and give new focus to the story.
2. Read aloud if your friend would be interested.
3. Talk about news of the day to discover friend's area of interest.
4. Write letters if necessary or encourage or help your friend to do so.
5. Help to revive old interests or talents or hobbies.
6. Develop new interests, such as: scrapbooks, plants, knitting, drawing, music, cards, T.V., politics, and community affairs.
7. Bring flowers, cuttings of plants, or magazines.
8. Play simple games, checkers, Scrabble, cards, cross-word puzzles.
9. Admire and give importance to the possessions and person of your friend.
10. Encourage interest and pride in appearance by observing and noting.
11. Encourage and show them how to do things for themselves and others, (household chores, mending, errands).
12. Plan little projects together.
13. Inject a pleasant surprise now and then but remember the older person often is not adaptable to "surprise."
14. Be alert to learn about friends and relatives, who they are, where they are, how they relate to your friend. You may be able to restore old contacts.
15. Be alert as to type of personality — then you may help in creating new friendships for your friend when you can "match" them up. But *know* the second person you refer first.

16. *Respect Confidences* — they are not subjects for dinner table conversation. When serious, and you have to report to agency worker, your friend must know you have to do this.

17. Be alert to attention span of your friend — sense of time is often clouded — fatigue sets in very soon with some older persons.

DON'TS FOR THE FRIENDLY VISITOR

1. Do not be condescending or patronizing.
2. Do not be *too* sympathetic.
3. Do not bring your own problems to the friend in a burdening or monopolizing way.
4. Do not be critical.
5. Do not engage in arguments.
6. Do not make a promise you may not be able to keep.
7. Do not become discouraged too soon; give it a *good* try.
8. Do not *"push"* friend into activity — a gentle prod, encouragement, and timing are helpful.
9. Do not advise friend as to business or legal matters, without the advice of your agency worker.
10. Do not give physical care.
11. Do not give medicine.
12. Do not tire the older person.
13. Do not "gossip" about friend to your family or friends.

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SUGGESTED

For Volunteers and

THE NURSING HOME VISITOR
Faunce, Frances Avery
Abingdon Press

BETWEEN PARENT AND CHILD
Ginott, Haim G.
MacMillan and Company

BETWEEN PARENT AND TEEN-AGER
Ginott, Haim G.
MacMillan and Company

A MOUSE IS MIRACLE ENOUGH
Lockwood, Myra
Farrar, Strauss & Giroux

THE OLDER PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE
Schifferes, Justus J., Ph.D.
Pocket Books, Inc.

YOU AND YOUR AGING PARENTS
Edith M. Stern with Ross, Mabel, M.D.
Harper & Row

GOOD GRIEF — A CONSTRUCTIVE APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF LOSS
Westberg, Granger E.
Fortress Press

YE VISITED ME
Board of Social Ministry of Lutheran Church in America
231 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016

READINGS

Nursing Home Personnel

THE VOLUNTEER AND THE OLDER PERSON
A GUIDE FOR THE CHAIRMAN OF VOLUNTEERS
Div. of Services for the Aging,
Kansas State Dept. of Social Welfare, Topeka, Kansas

OREGON'S HANDBOOK FOR VOLUNTEERS
SERVING THE AGED
Oregon State Board of Health
P.O. Box 231, Portland, Oregon 97207

WORKING WITH OLDER PEOPLE
U.S. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare
Public Health Service, Publication No. 1054

MAKE EACH PERSON COUNT
A Guide for Nursing Home Administrators
U.S. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare
Public Health Service, Publication No. 1459, Vol. I

AGING
Bi-monthly Publication
U.S. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare
Administration on Aging

HANDLE YOURSELF WITH CARE
An Instructor's Guide for an Accident Prevention Course for Older Americans
U.S. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare
Administration on Aging, Social and Rehabilitation Service

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